



PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL: THE OPINIONS OF PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

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Abstract

*This research analyses the influence and conduct of the parents of young footballers belonging to the 14-16 years old league in the Balearic Islands (Spain). This study is focused on management behaviours, pressure, support, understanding and parents' active participation. The participants were 102 parents, including 63 fathers and 39 mothers who participated in the study voluntarily during the official competitions of the 2016-2017 season. These parents filled in a questionnaire entitled *Análisis del Comportamiento y Actuación de Padres y Madres en el Deporte (ACAPMD)*. Furthermore, 176 young footballers, with an average age of 14.26 years, ($SD= .48$) participated voluntarily in this study during the 2016/17 season filling in a questionnaire entitled *Parental Involvement in Sports Questionnaire (PISQ)*. The results show that, firstly, no significant differences between data obtained from fathers and mothers exist. Results also indicate that parents have high implication levels concerning their children's sport. Moreover, parents are interested in maintaining a good parent-child relationship and they value their sons' sports schools positively. On the other hand, parents don't agree with spectators' interventions from the grandstands during their children's matches.*

Key words: Parental influence; Grassroots football; Youth athletes; Parental involvement.

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Introduction

Physical activity is a crucial element in the integral education of children, due to its socializing function and its transmission of values (Garrido, González and Romero, 2010; González and Otero, 2005). For this reason an awareness of the behaviour of the different implicated educative agents in the sportive practice is important, if what we want to understand how young athletes develop the previously mentioned educative principles and values (Arias, 2008; Garrido et al., 2010).

Authors like Garrido, González and Romero (2010), suggest that there are various researchers who have affirmed that parents are among the most influential agents in the socialization of their children (Arias, 2008; Cruz, Boixadós, Torregrosa and Mimbbrero, 1996; Fraser-Thomas and Côté, 2009; Fredricks and

Eccles, 2004; Ornelas, Perreira and Ayala, 2007; Pallarés, 1998 and Weiss and Fretwell, 2005).

It is relevant to highlight that aspects like the information or emotional support provided by parents are related to the quantity and quality of sportive practice (Jowett y Timson-Katchis, 2005; Lorenzo, Cubero, Jiménez and Hertting, 2017; Sánchez-Miguel, Pulido, Amado, Leo, Sánchez-Oliva y González, 2015). Hence, it must be affirmed that children are able to participate in sportive activities thanks to the support of their parents (Fredricks and Eccles, 2004; Lorenzo et al., 2017). In other words, parents become essential for the formation of the personal characteristics of the young athletes. It is evident that getting involved into the habit of practicing a sport will result in improved health and an enhanced quality of life (Gimeno, 2003; Lorenzo et al., 2017).

Thus, parents must be responsible for transmitting to their children appropriate information concerning all the possibilities they can choose in the sportive world; but obviously they must take care with regard to different aspects such as: costs, timetables, the mode of transport they'll use, the subjective evaluation of their children or the economic possibilities of the family (Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Janes and Pennisi, 2006, 2008; Lorenzo, 2016; Wolfenden and Holt, 2005).

On the basis of Gould et al. (2006), it must be emphasized that parents' role against motivation and their children's competence is truly relevant. In the same vein, it's crucial to mention those parents who interact in the sportive practice of their sons encouraging or damaging the emergence of personal and behavioural positive attitudes during the course of a sport event (Lorenzo, 2016). Therefore, Gould et al. (2006) identified that contemporary society has tended to highlight those cases of extreme bad behaviour from parents, which negatively affect the sportive experience of young athletes. In fact, some authors have carried out various research from the grandstands; such as Bowker et al. (2009) who studied spectators' conduct during grassroots hockey. These authors found that the most notorious comments were positive, and that the negative comments were directed towards the referee (Elliot and Drummond, 2015).

Omlil and LaVoi (2009) carried out similar findings in grassroots football, indicating that parents shouted at their sons only moderately (Elliot and Drummond, 2015). Furthermore, it becomes essential to mention that Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehn and Wall (2008) showed the nature of parental involvement in grassroots football, and they confirmed that approximately 35% of all the comments were related to supporting their children, while 15% were negative comments (Elliot and Drummond, 2015).

Other research, such as that carried out by Meân and Kassing (2007) show parental comments which aimed to support their sons' aggressive tactics, to underline the importance of winning, and to scold those youth athletes who made mistakes during the match (Bean, Tosoni,

Baker and Fraser-Thomas, 2016). It's also remarkable that the study carried out by Shields, Bredemeier, LaVoi and Power (2005), indicates that 14% of parents involved in grassroots sport admit that they have shouted or argued with referees; that 13% of parents affirm they've criticised with anger the way their sons were playing; and 15% of young athletes have suffered angry attitudes from their own parents, because of their way of behaving in sport events (Bean et al., 2016).

Likewise, authors like Turman (2007) have also picked up negative experiences from parents in grassroots sport and, particularly, it must be emphasized that parents frequently give all kind of rewards to their sons to supplement their limited involvement. Additionally, Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Janes and Pennisi, (2008) maintain that some parents often offer money to their children to incentivize better sportive performance from them.

Walters (2011) has revealed that the earliest research related to the impact that the comments of parents present during grassroots sports events had (Graham, Ratliffe, Faucette, Salter and Walley, 1982; Randall y McKenzie, 1987; Walley, Graham and Forehand, 1982). The same author mentions that previous studies indicated that parents didn't make excessive comments during their sons' matches. Nevertheless, Walters (2011) affirms that subsequent studies (Blom and Drane, 2008; Kidman, McKenzie and McKenzie, 1999) indicate that, even though the comments made by parents were mainly positive, the significant number of technical instructions carried out from the stands and the level of negative comments registered were enough to be concerned about it.

Many kinds of parents are involved in contemporary sports, and because of this fact Roffé, Fenili and Giscafré (2003) established a classification of them. These authors differed between uninvolved parents who are identified by their lack of interest; balanced parents who are the ideal, according to Roffé et al. (2003); overprotective parents who are recognised by the moderate pressure directed towards their sons; parents who are ex-professional athletes, parents who are obsessed with sport and fanatical parents (Garrido et al., 2010).

To sum up, it is important to highlight the existence of authors (Blom and Drane, 2008; Kidman et al. 1999) who mention the importance of future research with the objective of identifying the nature of parental attitudes in grassroots sport. Furthermore, Kidman et al. (1999) have requested that future research intervenes in the educate and informing of parents about how they could provide a more favourable and positive sporting experience for their children (Walters, 2011).

From this perspective, it becomes necessary to include parents since they have the first contact with their children's sport. This fact is crucial; it would stimulate the continuation of children's sporting practice (Cruz et al., 1996; Garrido et al., 2010; González and Otero, 2005). Therefore, it is convenient for parents to be in constant formation, because they are the main agent of socialization in their children's lives and one of the most important around their sports.

Method

Participants

This research involved the participation of 176 young footballers who belong to the 14-15-16 year old category in the Balearic Islands (Spain). As the name of the league mentions, these athletes were between 14 and 16 years old ($M=14.26$ years, $SD=.48$). Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the number of young athletes who were 14 years old and participated in the study was 135; constituting 76.7% of the total. Thus, 37 of the young athletes were 15 years old; constituting 21% of the total. And, finally, 4 of the young footballers were 16 years old; constituting 2.3% of the total. Additionally, we counted the participation of 102 parents; 63 fathers and 39 mothers.

Instruments

First of all, it must be emphasized that parental involvement was studied using a sportive questionnaire (PISQ), Lee and Mclean (1997). This questionnaire has 20 items grouped into three factors: Managerial Behaviours, Support and Understanding, and Active Involvement. Cronbach alfa's values were obtained of .87, .67 and .61 for the three respective factors. These results are quite similar to values obtained by Lee and MacLean (1997): Managerial behaviour

(.82), Support and Understanding (.60) and Active Participation (.66).

Secondly, it's relevant to mention that the questionnaire used to analyse the behaviour of fathers and mothers in grassroots football was *Análisis del Comportamiento y Actuación de los Padres y Madres en el Deporte (ACAPMD)*, (Garrido, Zagalaz, Torres y Romero, 2010). This instrument has 44 items, which were answered by a Likert scale of 5 points ranking from "nothing" to "a lot". Cronbach alfa's values were obtained for .68 for the father-coach relationship, .73 father-son relationship, interventions in matches .75, interest and expectations .80.

Procedure

Firstly, it is essential to point out that permission for performing this research was obtained by the local Government. This study belongs to one part of the project of the Balearic Islands' Government (Spain) called *Posam Valors a l'Esport*. Afterwards, clubs' management teams and parents of the twelve chosen teams gave us permission; which was crucial to begin the study. The participants were informed about the confidentiality of the obtained data, accepting voluntarily participation in the study.

Questionnaires (PISQ and ACAPMD) were completed at the beginning of the 2016-17 season. Participants had the possibility of completing them 30 minutes before a training session in a period of time estimated by the coach who was contacted previously. One of the researchers was present at the football stadiums during completion of the questionnaires to resolve any possible doubts that could appear. The average duration to complete the questionnaires was around 20 minutes.

Data analysis

In first place, it should be highlighted that all the statistical analysis was done using the statistics program SPSS21 (IBM Corporation, 2012).

Therefore, the average and standard deviation were calculated for every variable of PISQ (Lee and MacLean, 1997) and ACAPMD (Garrido et al., 2010).

Concretely, three factors of PISQ have been analysed: Managerial Behaviours, Support and Understanding, and Active Involvement. A study pertaining to the averages of fathers and mothers was also carried out. This study

calculated the following variables: Father-coach relationship, satisfaction, father-son relationship, involvement, interventions in matches and interest-expectations.

Results

In table 1, we can observe how parental attitudes towards support obtain more punctuation along with managerial behaviours and parental involvement.

Table 1. Study of parental involvement (PISQ)

	<i>X (SD)</i>	<i>F(p)</i>	<i>r</i>
Support and Understanding	3.75(.83)	.51(.894)	.97
Active Involvement	2.86(.90)	2.09(.024) *	.95
Managerial Behaviors	3.03(.88)	.65(.780)	.96

On the other hand, we find in table 2 that the highest variable of fathers and mothers is their involvement, followed by parents-sons relationship and for the evaluation of the sport school. Otherwise, the lowest mean is the interventions in matches, followed by the interest

and satisfaction. It becomes necessary to underline that there is no statistically difference between fathers and mothers in the studied variables.

Table 2. Study of averages of fathers and mothers (ACAPMD)

	<i>X (SD) fathers</i>	<i>X (SD) mothers</i>	<i>X (SD) Total</i>	<i>F(p)</i>
P-C relationship	2.34 (.67)	2.17(.59)	2.27(.64)	1.56(.214)
Satisfaction	3.27 (.59)	3.25(.67)	3.27(.62)	.32(.858)
P-S relationship	3.44(.87)	3.51(.89)	3.47(.87)	.14(.708)
Involvement	3.89(.72)	3.53(.59)	3.76(.69)	6.85(.010)
Interventions in matches	2.69(.93)	2.44(.72)	2.60(.87)	1.80(.183)
Interest/expectations	3.27(.66)	3.24(.69)	3.26(.67)	.061(.805)
School evaluation	3.61(.45)	3.43(.50)	3.54(.48)	3.53(.063)

Following analysis of the obtained data, as a result of communication skills and team

workability, a significant difference has not been found in terms of comparison of participants

according to gender ($p < 0,05$). In this respect, male students ($X = 3,68 \pm 398$) have higher communication skill levels than female students ($X = 3,48 \pm 430$). In terms of team workability comparison of participants according to gender, a significant difference has not been found ($p < 0,05$). In this respect, male students ($X = 3,39 \pm 380$) have higher team workability levels than the female students ($X = 3,25 \pm 421$).

Discussion

The main aim of this study was to show the opinions of parents and their children concerning parental involvement in grassroots football. Now, considering the cited objective, it becomes relevant to mention that according to parents' opinions the obtained outcomes confirm that participating parents show high values of involvement in their children's sport. Moreover, these parents are interested in maintaining a positive parent-child relationship; and they value positively the sports schools of their sons. In that sense, it's remarkable that those fathers and mothers who have participated in the current research are not in favour of parents' interventions from the stands during their children's matches. It is also necessary to underline that there are no significant differences between the interventions of fathers and mothers. In the same way, Carratalà, Gutiérrez, Guzmán and Pablos (2011) manifested that there weren't significant differences between fathers and mothers concerning the perception of their own behaviour.

It is also noteworthy that parents completed the ACAPMD questionnaire noting their own conduct related to their sons' sport; and, on the other hand, young footballers manifested their points of view concerning their parents' behaviour in the sportive ambit with the PISQ questionnaire.

Carratalà et al. (2011) tried to emphasize that parents perceived more positively factors related to coaches, respect among parents and the organization of the competition; and, in contrast, they perceived factors related to referees and fair play slightly more negatively (Carratalà, Gutiérrez, Guzmán and Pablos,

2011). According to Carratalà et al. (2011) young athletes are the group who perceive more positively the factors of the sportive environment. These authors suggest that athletes appreciate educator-coaches more positively than their own parents; and, additionally, they manifest a better perception of the factor of respectful parents rather than their own parents.

The outcomes found in the present research show how parents are against their own interactions from the stands during the course of their children's matches. And, in contrast with Carratalà et al. (2011) the parents analysed in the present study think that their relationships with coaches are almost non-existent. Likewise, the results found relating to the children's questionnaire highlight that the young athletes feel that their parents are significantly involved in supporting and understanding them. However, it becomes crucial to highlight how athletes mention that while their parents' active involvement is not enough, parents feel that their involvement is one of their strengths. Thus, a controversy arises, because both groups have different opinions about parents' involvement in their children's sport.

In practical implementation, it must be considered that parents have to accept their interventions from the grandstands should be based on positive reinforcement and respect towards all the socialising agents of sport. This fact is vital if the sporting environment wants young athletes to feel comfortable about themselves and to check how their levels of self-esteem increase.

This study presents some limitations. One of the main limitations of this study is the age range of the athletes because it does not allow a wider intergroup comparison, due to the fact that it is uniquely based on the 14-15-16 years old category. Another important limitation that must be underlined is that female footballers haven't been included in the sample.

Finally, the necessity to research the present field deeply is reflected, because it will be essential to compare different results with other authors and to obtain more objective conclusions about it.

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